

STATEMENT ON EAST TIMOR

TO THE UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE ON DECOLONISATION

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Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates:

It is an honour to speak on East Timor to the Committee of the United Nations which has played such a central role in one of the historic movements of our time, the decolonisation process.

The Australian Council for Overseas Aid, which I represent remains deeply troubled by the injustice perpetrated against the people of East Timor, our near neighbour. We wish to submit that the United Nations has a moral obligation as well as a duty to its own self-interest to keep the question of East Timor on its agenda. Any suggestion that the United Nations should allow this issue to drift unheeded into history or should actively work to contrive a political settlement which circumvents the rights of the East Timorese people we would regard as unprincipled complicity in one of the greatest human tragedies and one of the most flagrant breaches of international law in our time. The United Nations cannot ignore over 100,000 deaths, untold suffering, continued denials of human rights and the act of aggression in contravention of UN principles which was responsible for these tragedies. To adopt such a course would endorse the 'might is right' approach and foster contempt for the very institution of the United Nations and the universal principles which are its responsibility. On a more positive note it is the sincere hope of the Australian Council for Overseas Aid that the United Nations will continue its efforts with renewed vigour through the Secretary-General to achieve a just and lasting settlement of the tragic East Timor conflict. Another decade and more of destructive political and military conflict must be avoided. But in our judgement after many years of close involvement with the issue continuing conflict is inevitable unless the root causes of the issue are addressed and the fundamental United Nations principle of self-determination is upheld.

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates:

The non-government organisation I represent, the Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA), currently has some 70 member agencies. The Council is a peak organisation representing the interests of all the major Church and community overseas aid agencies in Australia concerned with relief and development. These agencies are involved with projects in many developing countries including many parts of Indonesia. The common objective of all members is to work for social and economic

justice, to respond to human needs and to help produce conditions through which people can realise their full potential as human beings.

ACFOA's involvement with East Timor spans twelve years. Our representatives worked in the territory after the civil war in 1975. They were obliged to leave at the time of the Indonesian invasion. Indonesia has refused access ever since despite repeated appeals by ACFOA to be permitted to deliver the much needed aid we were so well placed to provide in terms of our resources, experience in the territory and proximity. Despite these acute frustrations we have, however, been able to stay in close contact with the people and the situation mainly through international agencies, Church and refugee channels. Member agencies have provided some financial assistance indirectly through the East Timorese Church. Other consistent involvements have been refugees, family reunions, research and human rights protection.

In addition to providing sorely needed aid in the period immediately following the civil war late in 1975, the ACFOA mission was able to appreciate at first hand the rapid evolution of nationalist political consciousness amongst the East Timorese people and surmising that aggression would be met with stiff resistance the mission warned strongly against outside intervention. To quote the ACFOA situation report of October 1975: 'The two greatest humanitarian needs at that time were the restoration of peace in the vicinity of the Indonesian border and the urgent need to reduce the threat of widespread bloodshed that would result from a full-scale attack on East Timor'. These fears were tragically realised. In the name of integration, East Timor was forcibly annexed by Indonesia and its people subjected to a degree of suffering almost without precedent in the history of decolonisation.

For ten years ACFOA has urged that the people of East Timor be permitted to exercise their right to self-determination. We cannot accept as some have argued, that East Timor was both too small and too poor to be a viable economic and political entity. At least 32 members of the United Nations have populations of less than one million. It is undeniable that by 1975 East Timor had developed an educated elite of sufficient size to provide the basis for self-government. With good will and assistance to develop natural resources, East Timor might easily have been one of the more successful cases in the post-war history of decolonisation joining the many new states in our region who have in fact achieved independence since 1975. Nor is there anything unusual about split islands.

Indonesia shares two of these and one should expect if it were prepared to accept the status quo in relation to those it would be prepared to do so in relation to the island of Timor. I refer to the island of Borneo which is shared by Malaysia, Sarawak, Sabah and Indonesian Kalimantan, and to the island of New Guinea which is shared by Indonesian Irian Jaya and Papua New Guinea. Again we say there is simply no reason why East Timor should not be allowed to co-exist with Indonesian Timor. Indonesia's alleged claims on East Timor simply have no more validity than any hypothetical claim it might make on, for example, East Malaysia or Papua New Guinea with whom it could be argued Indonesia has some racial, cultural, historical and geographical affinity. Further it is important to observe that ACFOA was able to satisfy itself in 1975 that the East Timorese people would not have opted for Communism. Nationalism should not be confused with Communism. The fiction that Fretilin was a Communist party and a threat to regional security was fabricated by Indonesian intelligence. Indonesia deliberately falsified the entire situation at that time to justify to her ASEAN neighbours, to her Western friends and to the international community in general, her real aim of acquiring East Timor in complete disregard of the wishes of its people. It was a grave abrogation of their responsibilities that countries such as Australia and the United States, who understood the real situation, accommodated Indonesia's devious objectives to serve their own pragmatic geo-political and economic interests.

Self-determination is an inalienable right under the UN Charter. It is incredible that this option which has been taken for granted in the case of almost all other former colonies has been blatantly disregarded in the case of East Timor. For Indonesia to pretend that what transpired between May and July 1976 amounted to genuine self-determination coming as it did immediately after a brutal invasion to which resistance was still widespread and only a short time after an estimated 90% of East Timorese had declared their support for the independence objectives of the two major parties, UDT and Fretilin, is both unbelievable and an insult to the East Timorese people. Successive administrations in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have rightly refused to recognise the validity of this crude piece of political manipulation.

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Nothing has happened since 1975/6 to legitimise Indonesia's forced incorporation of East Timor or to cancel the right of the East Timorese

people to self-determination. The passage of time, the heavy weight of Indonesia's presence, or changes in the material circumstances should not be permitted to obscure the central fact that Indonesia's occupation remains illegal and that the East Timorese have been cynically denied any opportunity to decide their own future. As the US State Department's Senior Legal Adviser testified to Congress in 1977 the right to self-determination continues to exist until it has been excised. Accordingly ACFOA submits that the United Nations has a clear moral obligation to keep the issue on its agenda and to persist with the question regardless of other factors such as those referred to above or indeed the level of military resistance by Fretilin. Even the total physical annihilation of Fretilin, which so obsesses Indonesia's Armed Forces Commander, General Benny Murdani, would not diminish one iota the United Nation's responsibility on this question of principle.

In this context, let me say Mr Chairman that ACFOA has been alarmed to hear suggestions - whether well-founded or not we are not able to judge, that the UN is considering observing the Indonesian general elections in East Timor next year, presumably as a way of measuring Timorese attitudes towards integration.

A United Nations visit to East Timor for this purpose would be a highly political exercise essentially different in character to, for example, a fact-finding mission. In the circumstances of a general election it could only be interpreted as tacit acceptance by the United Nations that East Timor is part of Indonesia. Furthermore it would be utterly absurd for the UN or any observer to look to the Indonesian election process as an impartial, objective barometer of public opinion.

Let me read what the former Secretary-General of ASEAN, Lt.Gen. Dharsono had to say about the Indonesian election process during his political trial in Jakarta in January this year. General Dharsono it should be noted was a key figure in the establishment of President Suharto's New Order Government. Having noted that political parties other than the Government controlled Golkar party have had their activities severely curtailed, Dharsono said: 'At election time, the parties and Golkar are supposed to receive equal treatment but in fact all government officials at every level favour Golkar and even the army is brought in to back it. People are forced to vote for Golkar by various means from seduction to intimidation, to beatings, dismissal

and even murder. All civil servants are obliged to join the civil service corps, KORPRI, which pledges their vote to Golkar. Their wives, too, are forced to join the Golkar campaign. And of course electoral manipulation has taken place. General elections, which should be a 'festival of democracy', have become a display of malpractices and of suppression of the peoples' sovereignty by the authorities. We can expect the same thing in the 1987 elections', concluded Dharsono.

Mr Chairman, if general elections are 'a display of malpractices and of suppression of the peoples' sovereignty by the authorities' in Indonesia proper, a fortiori how could any credibility be extended to the process in isolated and occupied East Timor where political freedom is non-existent and the military a law unto itself. The United Nations, whose Special Representative Winspeare Guicciardi was frustrated by Indonesia from carrying out his mission in 1976 and which rightly boycotted the Indonesian manipulated 'self-determination' process that same year, would be the object of international ridicule were it now to identify itself in any way with Indonesian style elections in occupied East Timor. The Indonesian election charade is no substitute for self-determination. It would conflict at every point with the conditions for determining legitimate and genuine expressions of will to integrate with sovereign states laid down by the General Assembly in 1960. For all these reasons we strongly urge the United Nations to have nothing to do with any suggestion of monitoring the 1987 Indonesian general elections in East Timor.

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates:

A number of UN member states, including Australia, have sought to circumvent their obligations under Articles 55 and 56 of the UN Charter in regard to East Timor. Article 55 specifically provides for 'respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples' and under Article 56 'All Members pledge themselves to take joint and separate action in cooperation with the Organisation (of the United Nations) for the achievement of the purposes set forth in Article 55'.

Last August the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Hawke, recognised what he termed Indonesia's 'sovereign authority' over East Timor. This was widely seen as a political manoeuvre to appease Australia's large aggressive neighbour and to clear the way for exploitation of extensive deposits of oil and gas in the seabed north of Australia known as the Timor gap.

ACFOA deplores this totally unprincipled abrogation of Australia's human rights obligations under the UN Charter. To recognise Indonesian sovereignty is to endorse violation of the right which both the Prime Minister and his party at its recent national conference acknowledge has not been exercised in East Timor, namely the right to self-determination. The timing of the Prime Minister's actions could not have been worse. They amount to sabotage of the UN Secretary-General's highly commendable search for a just settlement of the Timor problem. By effectively withdrawing Australia's support for that initiative the Australian Government has pulled the rug from under the Secretary-General's feet at a crucial stage in that peace process when he might have reasonably hoped Australian and international commitment would have intensified not diminished. I would point out here, Mr Chairman, that significant sections of the Australian community share ACFOA's dismay over the actions of the Australian Government. They include many in the Prime Minister's own party, the Australian Labor Party, many parliamentarians and prominent citizens and the peak council of the trade unions in the country.

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Indonesian integration strategy in East Timor up to 1979 concentrated on major military operations aimed at gaining control of the population. Those military operations and the concurrent exclusion of any international emergency aid until late 1979, including the exclusion of ACFOA, resulted in the concentration of the bulk of the population in strategic centres called 'resettlement villages' and the deaths through starvation and disease of over 100,000 people.

Indonesian strategy since then has been more a 'hearts and minds' strategy accompanied by periodic military campaigns inevitably involving persistent and often gross, human rights abuses. Large sums have been spent on housing and schools in the 'resettlement villages' which remain the cornerstone of Indonesian attempts to control the population. Equally large sums have also been spent on infrastructure including administrative buildings, communications and roads enabling Indonesia to claim greater advances for East Timor under its administration than under Portugal.

This approach has earned Indonesia considerable kudos in some quarters of the international community. However it must be seen in its proper perspective as an integral part of Indonesia's attempts to

consolidate its presence and Indonesianise the territory and its people. While material changes have occurred including much needed improvement in the humanitarian sphere it is equally true that Indonesianisation equals the progressive destruction of East Timorese identity and culture. Of itself it constitutes a denial of social and cultural self-determination.

The considered views of the East Timorese Catholic church, to which most Timorese belong, are very relevant here. In a statement on 1 January 1985 the Church declared: 'The attempt to Indonesianise the Timorese people through vigorous campaigns to promote Pancasila, through schools or the media, by alienating the people from their world-view, means the slow assassination of Timorese culture. To kill the culture is to kill the people'.

In a word, Indonesia has engaged in re-colonising rather than de-colonising East Timor. Those who sing Indonesia's praises for the material changes wrought in East Timor and stop at that are missing the point. They also fail to appreciate that Indonesianisation is contributing to alienation just as surely as the continued fighting, and abuses of fundamental rights and is a guarantee that resistance, both attitudinal and military, will continue.

That is why, to return to the point we made at the outset of this brief statement, ACFOA is convinced on the basis of its long-standing and diverse contacts with the internal situation that long-term conflict is inevitable in East Timor unless there is a radical change in approach. Ten years have amply demonstrated that the solution does not lie in military, political or cultural violence but in respect for fundamental rights of which the United Nations is the international guardian.

Mr Chairman, distinguished delegates:

Several times in the course of this year the Indonesian Government has stated its determination to obliterate East Timor from the UN agenda. This should come as no surprise given the deplorable state of the Indonesian economy and the cost of its military and socio-economic colonisation of East Timor, both financially and diplomatically. As the Political Director of the Indonesian foreign ministry, General Sutresna said recently the diplomatic struggle over East Timor had 'sapped much of Indonesia's energy, thinking, funds and time'.

United Nations acquiescence to this objective would be a cynical and gross betrayal of a courageous, small and relatively defenceless people and of its commitment to the principle of self-determination. East Timor cannot be buried without that fundamental UN principle being buried with it. Equally importantly, such an action on the part of the UN would contribute nothing to a just and lasting solution on the ground in East Timor which must remain the fundamental objective.

Further to that we would conclude by encouraging the United Nations to urge open access to East Timor for non-government organisations in particular to enable independent, credible reporting on the situation and free dialogue with the East Timorese people. Neither can be had at the moment.

Thankyou.